

## New permanent exhibition - Synagogue Silver from Bohemia and Moravia



In December 2001 a permanent exhibition of silver from the collection of the Jewish Museum in Prague opened in the upper-floor prayer hall of the Spanish Synagogue.

The Museum's silver collection comprises over 6,000 objects made by thirteen generations of goldsmiths and silversmiths from Central Europe. Its current form shows the influence of various historical events that left their mark on the amount and types of pieces in the collection. In the past, silver objects were appreciated not only for their artistic value, but primarily for the amount of precious metal that could be used for other purposes when required; hence, only a fraction of the

early pieces has survived. For centuries Jewish participation in the trades and crafts was restricted, which is why a large portion of Jewish silver objects stems from the workshops of Christian manufacturers who were commissioned by the Jewish community and individuals. The first extant products of Jewish gold and silversmiths date from around the mid-18th century. Apart from the products of local workshops, which form the bulk of the

Museum's collection, there are also pieces that were fashioned in Germany, Austria, Silesia and other countries. The majority of objects of Bohemian and Moravian provenance were produced in the two largest cities, Prague (Jan Kogler, Filip Oberholzer, Jan Jiří Brullus Jr ) and Brno; a smaller amount stems from other Moravian workshops in Mikulov,

Znojmo, Jihlava and Olomouc.

Objects acquired from abroad include

outstanding work by golds and silversmiths from Augsburg, as well as certain products from Nuremberg and Breslau and a relatively large amount of more recent pieces from Vienna.



The types of objects in the new exhibition cover all aspects of the religious, social and personal lives of Jewish community members. There are (among others) sets of synagogue

and association alms boxes, Burial Society objects (dinner sets, beakers, combs and implements for ritually cleansing the deceased, Kiddush cups), Levite lavers and basins for ritual handwashing, ritual spice boxes, Kiddush cups, Hanukkah lamps, trays for charitable gifts, and Sabbath candlesticks. The most extensive sets comprise Torah ornaments – Torah shields, pointers, finials and crowns, which have been provided with the largest exhibition space.

The earliest pieces in the collection are Burial Society beakers and ceremonial cups dating from around 1600. Large numbers of synagogue silver objects, Torah shields, finials and pointers were produced in the first third of the 19th century, as Jewish communities sought to replace the losses incurred during the Napoleonic wars. A change in lifestyle at the end of the 19th century led to a decline in the number of orders for new silver objects, the most recent pieces of which date from the period just before the outbreak of World War II. The exhibition curator is Jaroslav Kuntos.



### **New acquisitions for the Holocaust department**

The Museum's Holocaust department has recently gained a number of significant acquisitions.

At the end of last year it acquired the papers of Egon Ledeċ (b. 1889 - d. 1944 at Auschwitz), the famous violin virtuoso, second concert master of the Czech Philharmonic, composer and founder of a string quartet in the Terezín ghetto. This extremely valuable set of previously unknown documents was donated to the Museum by Egon Ledeċ's nephew, Dr. Jan Ledeċ of Prague. It contains hand-written music scores from 1923-1941, family correspondence from 1908-1941, letters from the Terezín ghetto from 1944, personal documents, notes, photographs

and various printed material relating to the musical activities of Egon Ledeċ.

Another valuable acquisition from the end of last year is the Terezín magazine Bonaco, which was published illegally in 1943/44 by the girls from Home XI in L 414. This is one of the few surviving Czech children's magazines to have been brought out by girls in the ghetto. The magazine itself has an interesting history: it was rescued by the girls' custodian Mrs. Gertruda Ākrtová (née Sekaninová) and, after her death, was handed over by her heirs (with help from the Czech dissent) to Mr. Stephen Dean in the US in the second half of the 1980s - it was thought that it would have a better chance of survival beyond the borders of the Communist regime. Bonaco has now been returned by Mr. Dean to the Czech Republic, specifically to be housed in the collection of the Jewish Museum in Prague. The five extant copies of the magazine (64 folios of

original typescripts with drawings) constitute a rare archive document and an important part of the literary and artistic output of the Terezín ghetto. Bonaco has been restored and reprinted this year.

The third acquisition from last year is a complete and original set of 22 mostly bound copies of the banned magazine "Gossip from the Jewish Swimming Pool", which was published in 1940/41 by Jewish youth from České Budějovice. (The Jewish swimming pool was one of the few places where young Jews were allowed to congregate). The copies contain original hand-written texts and typescripts with drawings, photographs and a list and characterization of the individuals who met at the pool, together with the signatures of readers. In the course of time, the humorous texts of the magazine devoted increasing attention to such issues as the persecution of the Jewish population, youth labour, emigration and Zionism. This considerably valuable and unique document was donated to the Museum by Hana Kende from England and Jiří Kende from Germany; it had been handed down to them



by their parents who used to meet at the Jewish swimming pool. The publisher of the magazine was their uncle Rudolf Stadler (b. 1924 - d. 1944 at Auschwitz).

In addition to a whole range of minor personal papers belonging to former inmates of the Terezín ghetto and Nazi camps, correspondence, photographs and memoirs, another two comprehensive and remarkable sets of documents were acquired last year. This comprises the pre-war papers of Bruno Zwicker (b. 1907 - d. 1944 at Auschwitz), a comprehensive school teacher, esteemed sociologist and well-known educational worker at the child's home of the Terezín ghetto. It includes his correspondence and autobiography as well as a bibliography drawn up after the war by former colleagues (126 folios of original texts). It was donated to the Museum by Dr. Jan Buryška from Ostrava.

The last major acquisition is that of diaries from Jewish children's homes in Prague from 1943. They contain entries made by children who visited these day centres and include descriptions of their various activities and programmes. There are 58 folios of original manuscripts, arranged in three volumes. In view of the lack of extant documents on Jewish schools, kindergartens, children's homes and other such institutions during the second world war, the newly discovered diaries represent an important historical source. The diaries were donated to the Museum by Mrs. Marta Olešová from Prague, who worked in a children's home as a nurse.

## **Reformatting of endangered periodicals in the Museum's Library**

The book collections of various cultural institutions contain manuscripts, old printed books and other rare historical sources, as well as somewhat neglected printed papers from the 19th century and the first half of the 20th century. The latter material, however, is of considerable cultural, historical, social and informational value and is often preserved in a single and incomplete copy. Periodicals and newspapers, in particular, have become a major source of knowledge, which is why they are used by researchers and the general public. Copies of such material are also in most demand from foreign readers. It is precisely these widely used documents that are most at risk - from the decay of acidic paper and from actual handling, however careful.

The newspapers in the library of the Jewish Museum in Prague also represent a highly valuable source of historical material, but their preservation is no easy task. The Museum has already successfully resolved the question concerning the regular care of its library holdings by creating an ideal environment to house them. But this does not guarantee the survival of the most important periodicals in its collection. It is of vital importance to the library, however, that the wealth of information contained in its documents (such as the Czech-Jewish Calendar, Selbstwehr, Jewish Papers and Jüdischer Almanach) should be made available to the public.

For these reasons, the Jewish Museum in Prague, in collaboration with the National Library of the Czech Republic, has set about microfilming its most important periodicals: the resulting facsimiles will (under the correct storage conditions) guarantee a centuries-long shelf-life for the periodicals. A microfilm is an ideal archive medium, but electronic records are more flexible, user-friendly and universal for the general public, which is why a hybrid method of reformatting was adopted for the microfilmed titles.

The documents that were recorded on microfilm have been digitized by a Sun Rise scanner at the protective reformatting suite of the National Library of the Czech Republic, which is the only workplace in Central and Eastern Europe to use this type of scanner. The resulting pictorial data are stored in disc form at the National Library (with the Jewish Museum in Prague copyrights guaranteed) and are also available for users of the Museum library in the form of CD-ROMs. The fact that digitized periodicals are easy to handle and allow for simple print-outs of selected parts makes them advantageous for both library staff and users. Microfilm records and digital copies of these periodicals will be kept in the European Register of Microfilm Masters. In this way the efforts of the Museum library to preserve important Judaica from the last 150 years are of benefit not only to the Czech Republic, but also to the whole world.



## **New paper and parchment restoration workshop**



As we mentioned in Newsletter 1/2001 we shall be showcasing the new workplaces that have been established at the Museum's headquarters since February 2001.

The workshop specializing in the conservation and restoration of paper and parchment was established as a completely new facility. It includes a laboratory and is equipped with multi-purpose facilities, which are necessary

given the relatively broad range of paper and parchment objects in the Museum's collection (a diverse set of drawings and graphic art, books parchment scrolls and archives). This workplace is where book bindings are restored, objects are cleaned via dry and wet processes, the hyperacidity of paper is reduced, missing parts of paper and parchment are replaced, and general restoration and matting of objects (an essential part of preventative conservation) is carried out. Restored objects are also documented with the help of a digital camera and a stereo microscope, which is an important instrument for determining the degree of damage to the paper or parchment and for selecting suitable restoration measures.

The climate-controlled laboratory is intended primarily for the restoration of the most badly damaged parchments that are sensitive to changes in climatic conditions. It includes a fume cupboard for work with chemicals and a light table.

All the facilities of the paper and parchment restoration workshop fully meet current EU standards.

## **Lost Neighbours Exhibition**



The Lost Neighbours project (see Newsletter 4/2000) produced a wealth of results which are now being showcased in a new exhibition. This project was launched in 1999 as part of the Holocaust Phenomenon Conference under the auspices of the Office of the President of the Czech Republic. Its aim is to remind the young generation

(especially 12 to 18-year-olds) of the fate of those who vanished from their neighbourhoods in the second world war. The Museum's Education and Culture Centre (ECC) prepared the groundwork for the project, drawing up the basic text, questionnaire and a list of possible themes, as well as organizing educational programmes and arranging meetings with Holocaust survivors. Students then gathered together the information acquired from school and local archives, personal encounters with Holocaust survivors and witnesses, narratives and documents (photographs and letters etc.), on the basis of which they prepared a literary and documentary report. In the autumn of 2000, the ECC published a volume based on the first seven reports and this was featured on the website [Chyba! Nenalezen zdroj odkazů.](#) . This subject matter was also filmed by Czech Television (Studio FATE, directed by Josef Dlouhý) and broadcast on 1 August 2001.

The new exhibition was on display at the Ghetto Museum–Terezin Memorial from 16 November 2001. The documents and personal narratives of almost thirty authors (whose work differs in approach, method and locality) have been arranged in seven panels and, at Terezín, were presented as an illustration of a self-educative process at an international seminar for teachers entitled *The Holocaust in Education*.



From 1 December 2001 this exhibition will be on long-term view at the ECC (Maiselova 15, Prague 1). Its realization was made possible also by financial support from the Prague 1 local authority and Prague City Hall.

### **French and Italian translation of “I haven't seen a butterfly around here”**



We have just published a new translation of this successful publication featuring a selection of Terezin children's drawings and poems from the collection of the Jewish Museum in Prague. Art lessons were organized for children in the Terezin ghetto by the outstanding artist Friedl Dicker-Brandeis; drawing provided a means of escape from the harsh reality of life at Terezín, as well as being a source of pleasure and therapy for the children. The poems that accompany the pictures in the book also reveal a lot about the life of children at Terezin. The preface is by Jiri Weil, the afterword by Anita Frankova. This is the first time it has been published in French and Italian (96 pp., 68 colour pictures).

## Prominent visits

### *October*

- On 31 October 2001 the Museum was visited by representatives of the **American Joint Distribution Committee** active in former Eastern bloc countries. After a tour of the Museum, they were informed about the activities of the Education and Culture Centre by Dr. Milos Pojar and about the situation of the Jewish community since 1989 by Dr. Leo Pavlat, Director of the Museum.



- A group of eleven conservation and restoration experts from specialist museum institutions in Munich
- A group of foreign architects and specialists involved in the development and rebuilding of towns, who were the guests of Prague City Hall